A White Paper

Veteran Stereotypes:

A Closer Look

Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Chairman's Office of Reintegration: *Veterans / Families / Communities*

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> There are stereotypes that somehow always emerge after a conflict. It does [veterans] a
> great disservice if we brand them with stereotypes.
>
> - General Martin E. Dempsey

The American military has conducted continuous combat operations for more than a dozen years. Over 2.5 million active duty, National Guard, and Reserve service members have deployed in support of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001.[1] These men and women – and their families – comprise a remarkable team characterized by courage, resilience, agility, and selfless service. For these reasons and others, Americans have more confidence in the military than any other institution or group in the country.[2] This confidence is well placed, and it is in our Nation's interest to continue to invest in these veterans and their families. They have much to offer our communities long after they hang up the uniform.

Each year for the next five years, more than 200,000 service members will transition from active duty service to the civilian community.   Many of them will face significant challenges as they reintegrate back into civilian society. As the University of Southern California's Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans and Military Families explains:

> Service members transition from a military environment structured to provide many fundamental needs such as housing, healthcare, employment and community, while also providing a sense of identity rooted in what it means to serve the nation. As service members transition from the military community, they are faced with the challenge of finding new avenues for meeting these needs while also navigating a civilian community very unfamiliar to them . . .[3]

Consequently, many veterans struggle with the challenges this transition presents, and it can lead to the risk factors that we hear about so often in the press: high unemployment; homelessness;

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[1] "Number of Members Deployed by Service Component and Month/Year," Contingency Tracking System Deployment File, Oct 31, 2013.

[2] Elizabeth Mendes and Joy Wilke, "Americans' Confidence in Congress Falls to Lowest on Record," *Gallup*, June 13, 2013, http://www.gallup.com/poll/163052/americans-confidence-congress-falls-lowest-record.aspx (accessed Nov. 4, 2013).

[3] Carl Andrew Castro, Sara Kintzle, and Anthony Hassan, "The State of the American Veteran: The Los Angeles County Veterans Study," USC School of Social Work Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans and Military Families, September 2014, 14.

isolation; suicide. These challenges are not insurmountable, however, and they do not define the value and future potential of today's post-9/11 veterans. Many veterans overcome these challenges on their own. Some need assistance and with the aid of government, non-profits, communities, and individual citizens, these veterans can and do overcome these challenges.

Misleading stereotypes that generalize these challenges and form an inaccurate national narrative about veterans can further stymie veterans' reintegration by increasing the divide of misunderstanding that currently exists between service members and civilians. This paper is not intended to argue that the reintegration process is easy, or that some veterans will not face the risk factors mentioned above. It is intended to openly discuss some of the more common stereotypes that stigmatize veterans and to spark a more informed national dialogue between veterans and civilians so that we can better understand each other.

Many of us feel a moral obligation to help prepare our veterans to live a fulfilling life after they've hung up the uniform. Each of our citizens has the right to choose how they will participate – or not – in reintegrating veterans back into civilian society. All Americans, however, should have an interest in veteran reintegration. The success with which we reintegrate our veterans and their families as they return to our civilian communities directly contributes to a sustainable, viable, all-volunteer force. The willingness of our nation's children to sustain our long tradition of voluntary service is a product of how they see our society embrace veterans and their families upon their return from service. Recognizing these men and women as valuable civic assets will inspire future generations to take the same oath and sustain the all-volunteer force.

The Prevailing Perspective – Common Stereotypes About Veterans

Mental Health

Stereotype: *veterans suffer disproportionately from post-traumatic stress.*

Fact: *while many veterans experience post-traumatic stress, their susceptibility to post-traumatic stress is no greater than the average American.*

The mental health of service members and veterans has garnered substantial attention during recent conflicts. Media headlines and cursory summaries, constrained by space or limited attention spans, often imply that service members and veterans are dangerous, damaged, or both − a mischaracterization of more than 21 million veterans across the nation. In fact, 8 in 10 Americans think that post-9/11 veterans are more likely to suffer from mental health issues than their civilian counterparts.[4] Since recent veterans comprise such a small portion of the population, hasty descriptions can unfairly shape the only impression many Americans have of those who have served.[5] Not only are these characterizations harmful for veterans, but they fail to acknowledge that mental health conditions like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and mild Traumatic Brain Injury (mTBI) are not unique to service members and veterans, and that they can be treated and accommodated when required.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, PTSD can affect anyone regardless of age, gender, or occupation, after they have seen or lived through a dangerous event.[6] Accident or crime victims, first responders, and anyone faced with a stressful situation can experience symptoms of PTSD.[7] While fear is a normal reaction to perceived danger, those with PTSD may feel "stressed or frightened even when they're no longer in danger."[8]

A recent summary of studies focusing on "US combat veterans" noted a PTSD prevalence range of 2-17%.[9] In June 2014, the Department of Veterans Affairs reported that

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[4] Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, "Strengthening Perceptions of America's Post-9/11 Veterans Survey Analysis Report," June 17, 2014, 5, http://www.gotyour6.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/GY6-Survey-Analysis-Report-2014.pdf (accessed Oct. 22, 2014).

[5] Ibid.

[6] National Institute of Mental Health, "Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)," 1. http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/nimh_ptsd_booklet.pdf (accessed Nov. 14, 2013).

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Lisa K. Richardson, B. Christopher Frueh, and Ronald Acierno, "Prevalence Estimates of Combat-Related PTSD: A Critical Review," *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 44 (Jan 2010): 2, http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20073563 (accessed Oct. 29, 2013).

350,898 post-9/11 veterans were seen in VA facilities for provisional or potential PTSD.[10] These

numbers could be misleading, however, unless placed in proper context. The National Institute

of Mental Health reports PTSD prevalence among the U.S. adult population at 3.5% per year.[11]

This equates to over 8 million cases of PTSD among the U.S. adult population in 2012. A study

following Hurricane Katrina found that PTSD prevalence was 19% for police officers and 22%

for firefighters involved in response efforts.[12] According to the *Archives of General Psychiatry*,

26% of American adults are affected by some mental health disorder each year, the

preponderance (18%) of these being anxiety disorders like PTSD.[13] Despite this, 83% of

Americans believe that post-9/11 veterans are more likely to suffer from mental health issues

than their civilian counterparts.[14]

The point is that post-traumatic stress is a natural human response to a traumatic event.

Unfortunately, many believe that veterans pose a higher risk of suffering from mental health

issues such as PTSD. While many veterans experience PTSD, their susceptibility to post-

traumatic stress is not necessarily greater than that of the average American. More importantly,

this diagnosis should not imply that the impairment is permanent and invulnerable to treatment,

or that they function at a lower level than those without PTSD.[15] PTSD can be a serious

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[10] Veteran Health Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, "Report on VA Facility Specific Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and Operation New Dawn (OND) Veterans Diagnosed with Potential or Provisional PTSD," June 2014, 3.

[11] National Institute of Mental Health, http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/prevalence/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-among-adults.shtml (accessed Oct 22, 2014).

[12] B. Bernard and R. Driscoll, "Health Hazard Evaluation of Police Officers and Firefighters after Hurricane Katrina," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 55, no.16 (2006): 456-8, http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/23316739?uid=3739936&uid=2129&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&uid=3739256&sid=21102991372587 (accessed Oct. 19, 2013).

[13] Ronald C. Kessler, Wai Tat Chu, Olga Demler, and Ellen Walters, "Prevalence, Severity, and Comorbidity of Twelve-month DSM-IV Disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication (NCS-R)," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 62, no. 16 (Jun 2005): 4, http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2847357/pdf/nihms176704.pdf (accessed Nov. 14, 2013).

[14] Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, "Strengthening Perceptions." 5.

[15] Lisa K. Richardson, B. Christopher Frueh, and Ronald Acierno, "Prevalence Estimates of Combat-Related PTSD: A Critical Review," Australia New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry 44 (2010): 8. George A. Bonanno, Anthony D. Mancini, Jaime L. Horton, Teresa M. Powell, Cynthia A. Leardmann, Edward J. Boyko, Timothy S. Wells, Tomoko I. Hooper, Gary D. Gackstetter, and Tyler C. Smith, "Trajectories of trauma symptoms and resilience in deployed

challenge for anyone affected, but it is wrong to assume that most veterans have PTSD and, if they suffer, that they're forever damaged.

Stereotype: *because of combat-induced post-traumatic stress, veterans are a liability and can break at any moment.*

Fact: *there is no data that confidently links PTSD with a propensity for violence.*

Many people think of mental health illnesses in binary terms—either you have it or you do not. But mental health illnesses are complex and best represented on a continuum. While some of those affected by post-traumatic stress will experience symptoms that diminish over time without formal treatment, others need professional help and treatment. In many cases, service members are well prepared to deal with these challenges, and their PTSD may not cause significant challenges in the work environment. Leadership and social support are known contributors to mitigating the disorder - two characteristics inherent in military units.[16]

Though PTSD affects a comparatively small portion of the veteran community, misinformed concern about PTSD can prejudice veteran reintegration. The fact is that there is no data that confidently links PTSD with a propensity for violence.[17] Despite this, interviews with representatives from 69 companies of various sizes conducted by the Center for a New American Security revealed that more than 50% of respondents believed that negative stereotypes, particularly concerning PTSD, adversely affected veteran employment prospects.[18] Another

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US military service members: prospective cohort study," *British Journal of Psychiatry* 200 (2012): 320, http://bjp.rcpsych.org/content/200/4/317.long (accessed Oct. 19, 2013).

[16] Joseph Geraci, Mike Baker, George Bonnano, Barend Tussenbroek and Loree Sutton, "Understanding and Mitigating Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," in *Leadership in Dangerous Situations*, ed. Patrick Sweeney, et. Al (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2010), 85-6.

[17] Christina L. Lafferty, Kenneth L. Alford, Mark K. Davis, Richard O'Connor, "A Practitioner's Guide to Combat Veteran Workplace and Classroom Reintegration," *SAM Advanced Management Journal* (Autumn 2008): 7, http://vets.arizona.edu/clearinghouse/documents/practitioners_guide.pdf (accessed Oct. 22, 2014).

[18] Carrie Gann, "Sgt. Robert Bales-PTSD Link at Odds With Research," *ABC News*, March 21, 2012, http://abcnews.go.com/Health/sgt-robert-bales-ptsd-link-odds-research/story?id=15970059 (accessed Oct. 19, 2013). See also Margaret Harrell and Nancy Berglass, "Employing America's Veterans: Perspectives from Businesses," *Center for a New American Security*, June 2012,

survey noted that 46% of respondents thought PTSD and other mental health issues were a challenge to hiring veterans.[19] Uninformed views like these exacerbate veteran reintegration challenges and may even discourage those affected from seeking necessary treatment.

A comparison of Gerhard Falk's "Murder: An Analysis of Its Forms, Conditions, and Causes" with the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Most Wanted List for Violent Crimes in 2012 showed that the top three homicidal offenders by occupation are general laborers, construction workers, and gang members.[20] Despite this, American's don't often read headlines linking the propensity for violence with construction workers. Unfairly, they do read headlines hinting at the notion that combat veterans are more prone to violence despite the lack of data to back this assertion.

Stereotype: *veterans get TBI in combat, and are permanently damaged.*

Fact: *more than 1.7 million mild TBIs occur each year in the civilian community; most patients with mild TBI experience no long-term effects.*

Like PTSD, TBI is considered a "signature wound" of recent military conflicts. There were 253,330 diagnoses of TBI among military service members between 2000 and 2012.[21]

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http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/CNAS_EmployingAmericasVeterans_HarrellBerglass.pdf (accessed June 27, 2013).

[19] Employing Military Personnel and Recruiting Veterans: What HR Can Do," *Society for Human Resource Management*, 2010, http://www.shrm.org/Research/SurveyFindings/Documents/10-0531%20Military%20Program%20Report_FNL.pdf (accessed Nov. 6, 2013), 10.

[20] The Department of Veterans Affairs, "The "Dangerous" Veteran: An Inaccurate Media Narrative Takes Hold," http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/6026/the-%E2%80%9Cdangerous%E2%80%9D-veteran-an-inaccurate-media-narrative-takes-hold/ (accessed Oct 22, 2014).

[21] Hannah Fischer, "U.S. Military Casualty Statistics: Operation New Dawn, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation Enduring Freedom," *Congressional Research Service*, February 19, 2014, 7, http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RS22452.pdf (accessed July 11, 2013).

However, the majority were not combat related. According to the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center, more than 80% of TBI occurred while the service member was not deployed.[22]

Common causes of TBI in the military are not necessarily different than those in the civilian community: vehicle accidents, falls, sports, and recreation activities.[23] Since 2003, 80.3% of TBI cases in the Defense Medical Surveillance System (DMSS) were classified as mild.[24] The term *mild Traumatic Brain Injury* has become *de rigueur* among both the experts and the military community. In fact, the more prevalent civilian term *concussion* describes the same injury.[25] More than 1.7 million mTBIs occur each year in the civilian community.[26] Most patients with mTBI, or a concussion, experience no long-term effects.[27] Any stereotype suggesting mTBI should disqualify a veteran from an employment opportunity constitutes a rush to uninformed judgment. Further, even when there are employment-related challenges associated with mTBI, there are effective accommodation strategies which are well-understood and documented.[28]

Stereotype: *veteran behavioral health challenges are specific to this generation.*

Fact: *today's veterans are no more vulnerable to behavioral health challenges than previous generations, and have access to better diagnostic and treatment resources.*

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[22] "DOD Worldwide Numbers for TBI," *Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center*, February 13, 2013, http://www.dvbic.org/dod-worldwide-numbers-tbi (accessed Oct. 28, 2013).

[23] "Injury Prevention and Control: Traumatic Brain Injury," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, June 15, 2010, http://www.cdc.gov/TraumaticBrainInjury/causes.html (accessed Oct. 30, 2013).

[24] "DOD Worldwide Numbers for TBI," *Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center*, February 13, 2013, http://www.dvbic.org/dod-worldwide-numbers-tbi (accessed Oct. 28, 2013).

[25] "Facts for Physicians about Mild Traumatic Brain Injury (MTBI)," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/headsup/pdf/Facts_for_Physicians_booklet-a.pdf (accessed Oct. 29, 2013).

[26] "Injury Prevention and Control: Traumatic Brain Injury," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, March 18, 2013, http://www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury/statistics.html (accessed Oct. 28, 2013).

[27] "Long Term Effects of Mild TBI/Concussion," *The Center of Excellence for Medical Multimedia*, http://www.traumaticbraininjuryatoz.org/Mild-TBI/Long-Term-Effects-of-Mild-TBI-Concussion (accessed Oct. 30, 2013).

[28] See http://askjan.org/media/brai.htm; http://askjan.org/media/braininjury.html; and http://www.cap.mil/WSM/Solutions/ProductDisability.aspx?DisabilityID=4

At a national-level conference in 2013, a seasoned veteran of the Cold War era implied that today's veterans are more vulnerable to behavioral health issues than those of previous wars, explaining that his generation didn't have those problems and that they "sucked it up." On the contrary, the rigors of combat have always produced behavior health challenges. Lessons borne of "shell shock" after WWI led the US military to screen its enlistees for indications that they might be vulnerable to what we now know as PTSD. The screening process, looking for "psychological trouble signs," led to the rejection of 1.8 million potential WWII-era service members.[29] Despite pre-war efforts to reduce combat stress illnesses, the VA hospitals were "overflowing" with PTSD-like symptoms after WWII, as "1.2 million active-duty troops [were] admitted to military hospitals during the war itself for psychiatric and neurological wounds, compared with 680,000 for battle injuries."[30] What we call it has changed, and how we treat it has improved, but PTSD is as much a consequence of combat as are the physical injuries. Today's veterans are no more vulnerable to these invisible injuries than previous generations, and have access to better diagnostic and treatment resources.

Employment

Stereotype: *most veterans are not well educated.*

Fact: *the current generation of veterans exceeds, on average, national norms in education and intelligence; moreover, more veterans seek some post-secondary education than do their non-veteran peers.*

Applicants for military service must meet academic, moral, and physical requirements that disqualify most of their peers. In fact, only 25 percent of Americans ages 17 to 24 are

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[29]Michael M. Phillips, "The Lobotomy Files: Forgotten Soldiers," *Wall Street Journal,* 16 January 2014, http://projects.wsj.com/lobotomyfiles/?ch=one&mg=inert-wsj?mod=WSJ_article_E (accessed 16 January 2014).

[30]Ibid.

physically, mentally, and morally qualified for military service.[31] All Army and Marine Corps and 99% of Air Force and Navy enlisted personnel accessions were high school graduates in FY 2012.[32] Consequently, a higher percentage of veterans ages 25 and over have a high school diploma than their non-veteran counterparts.[33] In fact, as Thomas Meyer from Philanthropy Roundtable noted, the current generation of service members "exceed national norms, on average, in education and intelligence, health and character qualities."[34]

Although more non-veterans have a bachelor's degree or higher than their veteran counterparts, a higher percentage of veterans have completed some college coursework as compared to the general population as a whole.[35] In other words, although they don't all hold bachelor's degrees, more veterans seek some post-secondary education than do their non-veteran peers. What is not easy to capture or recognize is the experience many veterans gain during their term of service, especially over the course of numerous deployments. Although a Master Sergeant may lack the technical knowledge of an MBA, her ability to think critically, solve complex problems, work effectively in teams and under stressful circumstances, adapt to dynamic environments, and lead diverse teams has been honed by decades of practical experience that the traditional college graduate sorely lacks. Each veteran's experience is different, but "hands-on" education, often in the most challenging of environments, is a daily event in our military.

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[31] Dr. Curtis Gilroy, Statement to the House, Committee on Armed Services, Recruiting, Retention and End Strength Overview, Hearing, March 3, 2009 (Serial 111-112), http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-111hhrg50088/pdf/CHRG-111hhrg50088.pdf (accessed Nov. 25, 2013).

[32] Lawrence Kapp, "Recruiting and Retention: An Overview of FY2011 and FY2012 Results for Active and Reserve Component Enlisted Personnel," *Congressional Research Service*, May 10, 2013, 3, http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL32965.pdf (accessed Nov. 22, 2013).

[33] "Veteran Status, 2012 American Community Survey 1-year Estimates," *US Census Bureau*, http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_12_1YR_S2101&prodType=table (accessed Nov. 22, 2013).

[34] Thomas Meyer, *Serving Those Who Served: A Wise Giver's Guide to Assisting Veterans and Military Families* (Washington: The Philanthropy Roundtable, 2013), 153.

[35] Ibid.

Stereotype: *veterans do not possess relevant civilian jobs skills.*

Fact: *military experience imparts key vocational tasks, skills, experiences, and characteristics on service members that are highly-valued and required for success in business and industry.*

Service members and veterans are far more than rudimentary warriors, absent of any skill other than the application of violence. Lisa Rosser, an Army veteran and the founder of *The Value of a Vet*, noted that many companies describe someone with a bachelor's degree as exhibiting discipline, perseverance, teamwork, and communication skills, and that they can meet deadlines.[36] These same attributes are ingrained in service members during their initial entry training and reinforced for the duration of their term of service.

Common combat images—those showing the men and women of our armed forces in action—may leave one wondering exactly how those military skills translate when service members transition into the civilian community. However, 91% of military occupations have a civilian-equivalent position.[37] The military requires logistical, administrative, and maintenance specialists just as any large company or public entity might. A *Patriot Missile Defender* may not find precise equivalency in the civilian sector, but she has mastered the maintenance and operation of highly technical hardware and computer equipment, much like any field engineer. Similarly, the tactical and technical skills of an *Infantryman* might appear less relevant outside the military, but arduous training and experience instill invaluable attributes like leadership, accountability, resiliency, problem solving, and adaptability in these veterans.

The value that veterans bring to the civilian workforce should not be thought of only in terms of a direct skills-match between their military expertise and the job-specific skills required by civilian businesses. Over 40 years of peer-reviewed academic research from the fields of business, psychology, sociology, and organizational behavior demonstrates ten key vocational tasks, skills, experiences, specific abilities, attributes, and characteristics required for success in business and industry which military experience imparts to veterans. These include being

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[36] Lisa Rosser, interview with Tracy Byrnes, "The Value of Hiring a Veteran," *Fox Business*, November 11, 2013, http://video.foxbusiness.com/v/2829023521001/value-hiring-Veteran (accessed Nov. 11, 2013).

[37] "Jobs in Today's Military," *TodaysMilitary.com*, 2, http://www.todaysmilitary.com/static-parents/pdf/JobsInTodaysMilitaryParents.pdf (accessed Nov. 25, 2013).

entrepreneurial, assuming high levels of trust, being adept at skills transfer across contexts and tasks, leveraging their advanced technical training and ability to learn, being comfortable and adept working in discontinuous environments, exhibiting high levels of resiliency, exhibiting advanced team building skills, having strong levels of organizational commitment, having and leveraging cross-cultural experiences, and having experiences and skills enabling work in diverse work settings. [38] Potential employers would benefit from a broader and more nuanced recognition of the *characteristics* that veterans bring to the workforce. Our businesses, communities, and economy will benefit if employers hire veterans for the highly desirable characteristics and attributes that they already possess, and train them for the job-specific skills required in their civilian occupations.

Stereotype: *veterans are no more productive than any other candidate.*

Fact: *veterans, on average, perform as well or better than their non-veteran peers.*

Many companies have been actively recruiting veterans for years. Some have expanded veteran hiring goals out of a sense of patriotism or some other perceived obligation or incentive. Others recognize that hiring veterans simply makes good business sense. The Corporate Executive Board (CEB) recently released a study aimed at capturing the value proposition of veteran employees. CEB found that employee performance among veterans is 4% higher than non-veterans, and that veterans are 3% less likely to turn over. These conclusions may not seem striking at first, but when applied to a company of one thousand employees (where 1 in 4 employees are veterans) with $150,000 in average revenue per employee, the veterans' higher productivity and retention rate translate to an increased revenue of $7.3 million.[39] A Monster survey noted that 99% of employers believe that veterans perform as well or better than their

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[38] "The Business Case for Hiring Veterans: Beyond the Clichés," Institute for Veterans and Military Families, 2012, http://vets.syr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/TheBusinessCase7.14.pdf (accessed Sep. 11, 2014).

[39] "The Business Case for Hiring Veterans," *Corporate Executive Board*, 2013, 6, http://img.en25.com/Web/CEB/CLC7538513SYN.pdf (accessed Nov. 8, 2013).

non-veteran peers.[40] Furthermore, 97% of employers would recommend hiring veterans.[41] These figures offer both practical and economic incentive to hire veterans.

Stereotype: *veterans, conditioned to follow orders, lack initiative.*

Fact*: service members are trained and expected to act on their own initiative consistent with their commander's intent; this empowerment breeds an independence, maturity, and confidence in decision-making that should appeal to any prospective employer.*

Some unfamiliar with military service may believe that service members and veterans can only take orders and lack initiative or the ability to act independently. However, a service member's ability to execute intent-based operations is a defining characteristic of our American military—especially our non-commissioned officer corps. All service men and women, regardless of rank or occupational specialty, are trained to execute complex tasks in extremely challenging environments armed with a mission statement and the intent of their commander. The past 13 years of combat operations have honed a cadre of service members who are confident making decisions based on their leader's guidance and intent. Once they understand the purpose of their mission, their unit's key tasks, and the desired operational end state, junior leaders are empowered to make their own decisions.

This intent-based capacity, conspicuously absent in other armed forces in the world, distinguishes the American military (and its effectiveness) and underscores the significant responsibility delegated across our junior ranks. This empowerment across the US military breeds an independence, maturity, and confidence in decision-making that should appeal to any prospective employer.

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[40] "Veterans Talent Index," Monster, November 2013, http://www.about-monster.com/sites/default/files/MonsterVeteranTalentIndex_Nov2013.pdf (accessed Nov. 14, 2013).

[41] Ibid.

Reintegration (into civilian communities)

Stereotype: *veterans and their families are insular and won't contribute in the community.*

Fact: *the majority of service members and their families live in civilian communities and participate in civic activities within those communities.*

Military families live and serve in communities across the nation. They are not uniformly sequestered behind the fences of military installations. The National Guard and Reserves are an excellent example of how far the veteran and military family footprint reaches into our communities, but the majority of the active duty force lives off base, too. Some 63% of military families live outside of installations.[42] They are also active participants in their communities. Blue Star Families' annual survey found that 68% of respondents had formally volunteered in their communities within the past year.[43] Nearly 80% of military children attend public schools across the nation, and military families are contributing in countless communities, with 44% of military parents volunteering at their children's school.[44] While some may not recognize a military family's presence in their communities, the reality is that the majority of military families are already woven into the fabric of our communities.

The vast majority of veterans are strengthened by their service and as a result, are civic assets with great potential to continue serving and leading in our communities, businesses, and governments. Examples of veterans continuing to serve abound, all you have to do is look for them. Consider David Oclander, a retired U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel. After retiring, David moved to Chicago to help disadvantaged kids in the tough neighborhoods in the city. He is now

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[42] "Strengthening our Military Families: Meeting America's Commitment," *The White House*, January 14, 2011, 1, http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2011/0111_initiative/strengthening_our_military_january_2011.pdf (accessed Nov. 15, 2013).

[43] Deborah A. Bradbard, Rosalinda V. Maury, Michel Kimball, Jennifer C.M. Wright, Cammy Elquist Lore', Kathleen Levingston, Cristin Shiffer, Gail Simon-Boyd, Jennifer A. Taylor, and Anna Maria Mannino White, *2014 Military Family Lifestyle Survey: Comprehensive Report*, (Washington, D.C.: Blue Star Families, 2014), 24.

[44] "All About Military K-12 Partners," DoD Education Activity Partnership Program, http://www.militaryk12partners.dodea.edu/about.cfm (accessed Oct. 23, 2013).

a Principal Fellow at the Noble Network of Charter Schools. David's service after the military has helped the Noble Network schools achieve an overall college matriculation rate of 90% and eight of their ten campuses ranked among the top ten schools based on ACT performance in 2014.[45] Or consider Tammy Duckworth. She was one of the first Army women to fly combat missions during Operation Iraqi Freedom until her helicopter was hit by an RPG on November 12, 2004. She lost her legs and partial use of her right arm in the explosion. Despite these injuries, she continued to serve our Nation, first as an Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs and now as a Congresswoman for Illinois's 8th Congressional District. Or consider Jacob Wood. Jake honorably served four years in the United States Marine Corps, deploying to Iraq in 2007 and Afghanistan in 2008. He graduated Scout-Sniper School at the top of his class and in 2007 he was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal with "V" for actions in Iraq. Following his service in the Marines, Jake co-founded Team Rubicon, a non-profit disaster relief organization that puts veteran volunteers to work in responding to disasters around the world. These few examples represent the immense potential that all veterans have to continue serving after they've hung up their uniform.

Stereotype: *veterans can navigate their way through any challenge.*

Fact: *despite their significant potential, many veterans struggle to reintegrate for a number of reasons. Fellow citizens can speed our veterans' successful reintegration through simple coaching and mentoring that assists veterans in navigating reintegration challenges.*

As explained above, most veterans possess valuable characteristics and attributes that empower them with great potential to serve and lead in our nation's communities after their service. Despite this potential, many veterans struggle during their reintegration back into civilian communities. This dichotomy is partially explained by the fact that work cultures, peer networks, sources of identity, and points of view in the civilian community differ greatly from those that veterans knew for the duration of their service.   For many transitioning service members, the military culture is all they've known since they entered the service out of high school or college. Often all that's needed is time to adjust and find their next career.

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[45] The Noble Network of Charter Schools, http://noblenetwork.org/job-opportunities/careers (accessed October 21, 2014).

Another contributing factor that makes reintegration hard for even the most capable veterans is the divergence between the process by which we induct service members into the military and the process veterans undergo when they reintegrate back into civilian society. In sharp contrast to their induction into military service, during reintegration veterans have no drill instructor – no leader – to help them navigate the process. The reintegration process itself, and its inherent challenges, varies with each individual and their unique circumstances – there is no one-size-fits-all roadmap.   For many veterans, finding a new identity and sense of purpose that compares with that they enjoyed during their military service is extremely challenging and encumbers their potential to thrive in civilian society.   Perhaps most challenging is the fact that a veteran has to champion himself to earn a job or gain admittance to college, or start a business – something that is frowned upon in a military culture that values selfless service and personal subordination to the organization and its mission. The reality is that simple coaching and mentoring by those already living in the civilian community can have a profound effect on a veteran's reintegration success. Veterans do not need a hand-out, but a handshake. The most effective handshake includes a subsequent dialogue that helps the veteran navigate their civilian community and transition to the next chapter in their life.

The Veteran Perspective – Common Stereotypes Veterans Hold About Civilians

Stereotype: *civilians don't want to help.*

Fact*: the vast majority of Americans appreciate veterans and want to help them reintegrate; however, many don't know how to reach veterans or simply don't know what help is needed.*

In a TED Talk at the University of Nevada, Dr. Mike Haynie told a story about meeting a post-9/11 veteran named Tim on an airplane. Dr. Haynie described how they discussed Tim's struggles since leaving the military. Tim described how he had dropped out of college because he didn't feel like he fit in and how he was struggling to find meaningful employment. Tim went

on to tell Dr. Haynie that he felt anonymous, that he was alone in his struggles, and that no one wanted to help.[46]

As explained above, Tim's experience is common among many veterans who, after knowing nothing but the military culture for their adult lives, feel lost, alone, and unable to connect with civilians once they've hung up the uniform. This isolation can create a perception among veterans that the civilian community doesn't see them, doesn't understand them, and doesn't want to help.

Although multiple surveys show that veterans and the public both agree that the average citizen does not understand the military, our experience engaging civilians in communities across the nation over the last four years does not substantiate the perception that civilians do not want to help.[47] On the contrary, there remains a "Sea of Goodwill" that wants to assist veterans and their families in navigating the transition to civilian life. Unfortunately, this altruistic intent often fails to materialize into meaningful actions because many of the individuals and organizations that want to help either don't know how to reach veterans and military families in need or simply don't know what help is needed.

The divide of misunderstanding between veterans and civilians can exacerbate the challenges veterans face as they reintegrate into civilian life. Veterans can help to close this gap by self-identifying as veterans and by asking for help when they need it. Civilians can help with a handshake and meaningful dialogue with a veteran to better understand that veteran's experience and recognize their needs. "Together, we need to discuss who we are and what our wars mean to us," explained the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin E.

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[46] Dr. Mike Haynie, "The Moral Obligation to Know our Veterans," TED Talk, February 3, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oSWhIUiGang (accessed July 10, 2014).

[47] Pew Social & Demographic Trends, "The Military Civilian Gap: War and Sacrifice in the Post 9/11 Era," Pew Research Center, October 5, 2011, 8, http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/10/05/war-and-sacrifice-in-the-post-911-era/ (accessed July 29, 2014). Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation, "After the Wars Survey Results," The Washington Post, March 30, 2014, 2, http://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/page/national/after-the-wars-post-kaiser-survey-of-afghanistan-and-iraq-war-veterans-results-and-survey-methodology/901/ (accessed July 31, 2014).

Dempsey, because "we've learned to separate the warrior from the war. But we still have much to learn about how to connect the warrior to the citizen."[48]

Stereotype: *civilians are not worthy of the sacrifice made by our (veterans') brothers and sisters in arms.*

Fact: *service is not defined by military service alone.*

Service members and veterans can often view the world through the lens of military values and culture where selfless sacrifice, courage, loyalty, and a clear sense of duty are preeminent virtues. Consequently, veterans might judge those who have not served as lacking some of the values that veterans hold dear. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was quick to remind the military to recognize other, equally important ways our civilian citizens serve our country: "We are an all-volunteer force, but we are not all who volunteer. Service has always been fundamental to being an American. Across our country, police officers, fire fighters, teachers, coaches, pastors, scout masters, business people and many others serve their communities every day. Military service makes us different, but the desire to contribute permeates every corner of the United States.[49]"

Veterans should remember that many of the virtues they associate with the military profession are not the sole province of service members and veterans; most US citizens adhere to them as well. Perhaps American society just doesn't offer the same opportunities for civilians to demonstrate these virtues as publically as military service does during times of war. The uninformed veteran might conclude that civilians don't often live their lives in a manner consistent with the characteristics and traits inherent to military service.

This viewpoint runs counter to the professional military ethos. Our military today is comprised of volunteers, each of whom took an oath to support and defend our Constitution and the rights that it affords our fellow Americans – including the right to serve in the military or not, and the right to live their lives according to their own values. Any tendency to impose military

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[48] General Martin E. Dempsey, "The Military Needs to Reach out to Civilians," *The Washington Post*, July 3, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/general-dempsey-the-military-needs-to-reach-out-to-civilians/2013/07/02/b10c3bb0-e267-11e2-aef3-339619eab080_story.html (accessed March 28, 2014).

[49] Ibid.

principles on civilians as a test of their value is not only unfair, but a contradiction to the military's sworn oath to support and defend our Constitution.

Misperception: *veterans should expect the same level of responsibility and compensation as they enjoyed when they left the service.*

Fact: *veterans should expect to prove themselves in the civilian workforce and compete with civilian counterparts on their own merit.*

A misperception held among some veterans is that they can expect to find employment that affords them levels of responsibility and compensation commensurate with their pay and level of responsibility when they left the military. While some veterans find these opportunities, many do not. Civilian hiring managers, workforce development professionals, and corporate executives have often explained that this is an unrealistic expectation. Veterans had to climb the ladder of success while they wore the uniform. It is not unreasonable for any civilian employer to expect newly hired veterans to prove themselves in their new organization as they transition to civilian life.

Veterans, however, should not be discouraged by this reality. The very skills and attributes that they developed and honed during their military service can provide a competitive edge in the civilian workforce. By seeking opportunities that may not provide the same level of responsibility and compensation he might be used to, a veteran can still compete for greater responsibility and compensation after being hired. In a society such as ours, where individual merit, accountability, and performance are valued and rewarded—just like they are in the military—veterans should expect nothing less than to have to compete with civilian counterparts in the civilian world, and on their own merit.

Conclusion

While not everyone will have a relative or close friend serve in the military, it is important to remember that every service member came from our communities and that they all will return to our communities. Veterans and civilians alike have an obligation to better understand each other. Otherwise, we all might miss an opportunity to incorporate veterans into our communities as the civic assets that they are. Veterans and their families possess exceptional

potential to continue serving in our schools, businesses, communities, and government. We can seize that potential by working to dispel misperceptions and stereotypes in an effort to better understand each other.